

THE ANTI-COMMUNISM OF SENATOR McCARTHY

It Slays More Friends Than Foes

JAMES RORTY

STALIN had died, and the scramble for the succession was on. From the Soviet's East European satellites came premonitory rumbles. Soon they were to swell into the roar of the "June Days" in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. Every day brought new propaganda opportunities to the free world, and as usual, intensified Soviet jamming operations signaled Moscow's distress and vulnerability.

It was the long awaited turning point of the cold war. Our political warfare specialists should have been at their desks marshaling their data, pounding their typewriters, and beaming explosive broadcasts at a score of pin-pointed targets around the world.

Instead, a group of harassed and despondent executives and writers boarded a plane for Washington, where the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations was conducting one of the half-dozen official and

unofficial investigations of the Voice of America to which that organization has been subjected during the past three years.

McCarthy had spoken, and the leading nation of the free world had lost its voice.

The Voice of America hearings ran to fifteen innings, to 775 pages of the record, and to many—much too many—hours of television time. When they were over, the box score, as computed by informed and reliably anti-Communist observers, stood:

Communists exposed or destroyed: *none*.
Probable: *none*.

Anti-Communists lost to the Voice by discharge and forced or voluntary resignations: approximately *thirty*, including at least a dozen of the ablest professional propagandists in the service of the government.

This does not count some four hundred innocent bystanders hit by a general 25 per cent reduction of staff. The McCarthy attack left the Voice a sitting duck for the budget-cutters at precisely the moment when a free world diplomatic offensive and an expanded program of political warfare might conceivably have helped turn the Kremlin's internal confusion into paralysis, its diplomatic and political retreat into rout.

The disruption of the Voice could scarcely have been more complete if it had been a planned act of sabotage. In the off-the-record words of one of McCarthy's own subcommittee members: "We went through the Voice like a cyclone and left it a shambles."

To what end? What kind of an anti-Communist is this back-country lawyer, this ex-Marine whose swinging political burp-gun slays friend and foe alike? By a considerable number among the American people Senator McCarthy is regarded as "Mr. Anti-Communist"—the authoritative arbiter of who is or is not a loyal American, in or out of govern-

FEW members of Congress have within living memory engrossed so large a portion of the daily press as has Senator McCarthy of Wisconsin over the past two and a half years. The extreme right on the one hand, and the left on the other, are in accord in seeing him as the very model of an anti-Communist. Others, however, are much more reluctant to credit him with any such role. In our March issue, Nathan Glazer examined "The Method of Senator McCarthy." Here JAMES RORTY looks at McCarthy's full record on Communism and tries to evaluate his contribution in the light of the facts. Mr. Rorty, a long-time defender of civil liberties and libertarian causes, has made many significant journalistic contributions to the exposure of demagoguery and totalitarianism both of the left and the right. Notable examples in COMMENTARY were his "American Fuehrer in Dress Rehearsal" (October 1945) and (with Winifred Raushenbush) "The Lessons of the Peekskill Riots" (October 1950).

ment service. Does he deserve that title? What are his technical, moral, and political qualifications for such an elevation?

As the reader will note, this writer believes that Tail-gunner Joe must be credited with some achievement in this field. It is apparent—to this writer at least—that much of the current demagoguery of “McCarthyism”—especially that emanating from Communist and crypto-Communist sources—is often no less phony than the product of the Senator’s own propaganda mill. Unfortunately, however, the record also shows that, considered simply as an exposé of the Communist conspiracy domestically, the Junior Senator from Wisconsin has proved himself to be incompetent and irresponsible. It shows further that, judged by his over-all political record, the Senator’s contribution to the struggle against international Communist aggression is so lacking in solid conviction and objectives as to cast doubt on his right to be considered a serious anti-Communist.

AS AN anti-Communist, Senator McCarthy was made, not born. Huey Long was nursed on the endemic populism and socialism of a backwoods Louisiana parish that had actually seceded from the Confederacy during the Civil War. In comparison, Joe McCarthy grew up virtually in an ideological vacuum. His politics, first as a Democrat and then as a Republican, were strictly local and for votes. Since Communists also voted, he was careful *not* to dissociate himself from the Milwaukee party-liners. In the crucial 1946 Republican primary they provided, in all probability, just enough votes to enable Joe to take the nomination away from the late Bob La Follette, about whom the party had no doubts whatever; Bob had fought Communism effectively, at home and abroad, in print and on the platform.

Less than three years later, as a freshman Senator, Joe again displayed his political eclecticism and practicality by muscling into the investigation, by a subcommittee of which he was not even a member, of the trials of the Nazi SS troopers who had been convicted of the Malmédy massacres. This sortie,

in which Senator McCarthy was apparently repaying obligations to some of his German American constituents, was described at length by Nathan Glazer in the March issue of this magazine. In his role as defender of the SS prisoners and accuser of their American guards, Joe gave Secretary of the Army Royall and other witnesses a foretaste of the slippery cross-examination techniques for which he later became notorious.

The point of all this is that during the Senator’s early career he was merely a political go-getter, and anti-Communism was not his special gimmick. It was neither a conviction nor a platform plank for McCarthy either in Wisconsin or in Washington. To build on a simile borrowed from Rebecca West, Senator McCarthy was just a political power-house looking for a good publicity connection.

This, Joe hitched on to in his famous 1950 Lincoln Day speech at Wheeling, West Virginia, accusing the State Department of harboring a specific number (to be changed a few times) of Communists. This speech was prepared for the Senator by the Republican National Committee—though delivered with the usual McCarthy embellishments—and it’s hard to find out at this date whether it was intended as the opening gun in a major campaign. But whatever the facts may be as to his intentions at the time, the matter was settled for him when the administration and its supporters opened a ferocious attack on him, adding their own publicity to his own undoubted publicity-getting talents. Since then McCarthy has not let up in his attack on the State Department, barely pausing to note a new administration took over in January 1953.

It was natural for the Truman administration to turn its defensive fire on the most intemperate and vulnerable of the critics who were attacking the State Department, its personnel, and its policies. By broiling this anti-Red herring alive, they hoped to erase the public memory of the Hiss and Coplon cases; to forestall any disinterment of the hastily buried Amerasia case, with its links to the Institute of Pacific Relations and

the State Department China policy; to prevent any uncomfortable probing for the residual security and loyalty risks who still remained in the State Department despite the efforts of the Civil Service Loyalty Review Board to dig them out. In effect, the Truman administration hoped to discredit *all* its anti-Communist critics by making them exponents of the "McCarthyism" it was about to demolish.

It didn't work out that way. The Tydings Committee, which investigated McCarthy's charges, refused to subpoena essential witnesses, hard-boiled the Republican minority counsel, Robert Morris, and openly collaborated with Lattimore and his counsel. By its flagrant partisanship, it achieved the sheer disaster of adding seeming confirmation to McCarthy's wild charges of the administration's intimate linkage with the Communist conspiracy and of converting Tail-gunner Joe, in the eyes of a substantial section of the American people, into a persecuted patriot and martyr.

IN HIS book *McCarthyism: the Fight for America*, the Senator savors this bizarre transformation. He has little difficulty in disproving the frequent assertions of his critics that "McCarthy has failed to expose a single Communist." The fact is that a number, even if a relatively small number, of the shots called by McCarthy in his changing lists (205, 81, 57) of alleged loyalty, security, and "morals" risks were later proved to have been on the target. Thus, Theodore Geiger, Peveril Meigs, Edward Posniak, and others all either resigned, or were removed from their posts, primarily because of McCarthy's attacks. The McCarthy publicity, especially his publication of the June 1947 memorandum of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the minutes of the Civil Service Loyalty Review Board, added greatly to the pressures under which a reluctant Truman administration was forced to put teeth into the loyalty program. Again and again the Truman administration acted only after McCarthy had roared. Finally, the highly informative hearings on Lattimore and the

Institute of Pacific Relations by a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee would most likely never have taken place if McCarthy had not made the question of Lattimore's relation to Communism a national issue.

From this investigation came the massive accumulation of evidence that moved the McCarran Committee to conclude that Owen Lattimore "was from some time in the 1930's a conscious, articulate instrument of the Soviet conspiracy," and that the Institute of Pacific Relations was "a vehicle used by the Communists to orientate American Far Eastern objectives toward Communist objectives." Witnesses before the McCarran Committee charged that nineteen IPR members, associates, and employees cooperated with Soviet Intelligence here and abroad. Fourteen persons with IPR connections took refuge in the Fifth Amendment when asked to affirm or deny their affiliation with the Communist party and its underground apparatus, including many of those who staffed its central office.

Obviously, this was the achievement, not of Senator McCarthy, but of a committee to which he did not belong, and whose members, and even more its able and experienced staff, refrained from using the McCarthy tactics of headline hunting and inquisitorial mayhem.

Yet it is probable that for a high percentage of the television fans, all the way from Appleton, Wisconsin, to South Boston, the revelation of Owen Lattimore's role in helping mold pro-Soviet opinion and official policy was a notch in McCarthy's gun. What is more, they were right to the extent that the Senator's publicity barrage has helped to compel, sustain, and implement the delayed and sabotaged clean-up of Communist infiltration into sensitive areas of government.

This is far, however, from validating Senator McCarthy's title to be considered either a competent or a genuinely dedicated anti-Communist. He knew almost nothing about Communism when he made his first speech on the subject three years ago, and his sub-

sequ
less
til
the
tion
mer
imp
of C

F
McC
dent
with
mora
aim

T
outs
defe
with
comm
whic
ber.

post
by h
temp

previ
were
ested
clusi
preju
of "t
of sa
ing c

For
saw
unde
unde
Com
Amer
durin
susp
witne
mony
chan
the V
in the
For
susp
permi

sequent opportunities for learning have been less good than generally supposed. Not until this year, when he became chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Senate Committee on government operations, did Joe function in any important official way in the investigation of Communism.

FROM the first day of the Voice of America hearings it was apparent that Senator McCarthy's assumption of almost unprecedented inquisitorial powers had endowed him with no proportionately sobering sense of moral or political responsibility; nor had the aim of his trigger-happy burp-gun improved.

The inquiry was initiated and conducted outside any strategic context of offense or defense in the cold war. It was conducted without reference to the propaganda policy commitments of the Republican party, of which McCarthy insists he is a loyal member. Finally, the inquiry was bungled preposterously both by the Senator himself and by his brash and inexperienced staff. No attempt was made to build on the findings of previous investigations. Prospective witnesses were told that the Senator was "not interested in accenting the positive." The conclusions of the investigation were openly prejudged; again and again the Senator spoke of "the mess in the Voice" and hinted darkly of sabotage and conspiracy, although nothing of the sort was ever revealed.

For days on end the television audience saw and heard a procession of disaffected underlings, christened "the loyal American underground" by Howard Rushmore, an ex-Communist borrowed from the *Journal-American* staff to serve as research assistant during the inquiry. The personal grievances, suspicions, and unchecked gossip of these witnesses were given priority over the testimony of responsible executives who got a chance to set the record straight only after the Voice had been damned irremediably in the minds of millions of television viewers.

For what it was worth in arousing the suspicions of the religious, a witness was permitted to direct a wholly unwarranted

hearsay charge of "atheism" at the director of the Voice's religious activities. Equally phony sex interest was introduced by a witness who was later found to be in need of treatment for a nervous breakdown. Overworked executives were bullied relentlessly; in one case for having written—twenty years ago—a callow book about college football; in another, for having scribbled on the margins of scripts intelligent criticisms which the Senator quoted out of context.

Fifteen minutes of television time was consumed by the Senator in a stubborn, pseudo-moronic effort to make Edward Kretzman, the able and intelligently anti-Communist policy director of the Voice, say that an able and intelligently anti-Communist assistant merited dismissal. His offense? He had referred to the standard theoretical cant of Marxism as a "fig leaf of respectability" used to conceal the naked viciousness of totalitarian terror and fraud.

Repeatedly, Senator McCarthy sniped at Bertram D. Wolfe, director of the Ideological Advisory Staff of the Voice. Mr. Wolfe, once a member of the politburo of the American Communist party, broke with Communism in 1929, along with the "right-wing" opposition led by Jay Lovestone. For many years, as a journalist and historian, he has fought Communism consistently in print and on the lecture platform, before, during, and after the Grand Alliance. Any list of the ten most effective anti-Communists in America would have to include him. During three years with the Voice he has pressed consistently for more aggressive propaganda policies and some of the campaigns which he initiated and directed (slave labor, the Katyn massacre) scored notable propaganda victories for our side. Yet all this, plus his clearance after an extended hearing by the Civil Service Loyalty Review Board, did not prevent McCarthy from raising doubts as to the genuineness of Mr. Wolfe's conversion.

Only once in the course of the inquiry did it look as if McCarthy might have stumbled upon pay dirt. Confusing testimony by VOA engineers and outside con-

sultants suggested the possibility of major waste and mismanagement, with possible overtones of conspiracy and sabotage, in connection with the location of the Voice's West Coast transmitter. It turned out that the fault lay not so much with the Voice's painfully cautious management as with its engineering consultants. The latter were unable until recently to agree that, all things considered, the location of Baker West had best be shifted from near Seattle to Southern California. Meanwhile an engineering subordinate had a nervous breakdown and committed suicide. The end result of this loud saboteur hunt, which no other investigating committee would conceivably have let get outside executive session, was that the original purpose of the powerful Baker West and Baker East stations—to overcome Soviet jamming—was completely forgotten. The plans for both stations were abandoned, a consummation devoutly welcomed, one can be sure, by the Kremlin.

Inevitably, as the McCarthy inquiry went from bad to worse, the morale of the Voice, which had been excellent, dropped to an all-time low. Policy conferences were paralyzed by fear lest the "loyal American underground" pour more tales into the ears of Messrs. Cohn and Schine. Feature writers used their noon hours to scout for less frustrating jobs. Veteran propagandists, their hands tied by panicky policy directives from Washington, got sicker by the minute. Back of the Iron Curtain the Communist press and radio jubilated openly.*

IS MCCARTHY really unable to tell a Communist from an anti-Communist, or is his obtuseness feigned—part of the McCarthy act?

*In measuring the harm done by McCarthy to the anti-Communist cause, much weight must be attached to his inadvertent but effective collaboration with Communist and neutralist propaganda abroad. If the Kremlin's agents and sympathizers in France, England, and Italy hadn't had McCarthy, they would have been forced to invent him. Today all over Europe, and indeed throughout the world, he has become the living symbol of the alleged decline and fall of American freedom and humanity.

Joe's recent duel with James Wechsler and his earlier debate with Towner Phelan in the February 1952 issue of the *Freeman* provide typical examples of this obtuseness.

Was it cold cynicism, as Wechsler insists, that prompted McCarthy to insinuate that Wechsler's anti-Communism, of which he has given quite adequate proofs, was a piece of fakery assigned him by a Communist conspiracy to which he remains secretly loyal?

And how does one explain Joe's action in giving Towner Phelan, a conservative Catholic lawyer, a kind of suspended sentence to the same crowded Red limbo reserved for Wechsler, the *Daily Worker*, Clement Attlee, the ADA—indeed for all those who have "smeared" the fastidious Senator?

On the surface Joe's automatic excommunication of his critics frequently doesn't seem to make sense in terms of practical American politics. Thus, McCarthy's reply to Phelan cost him conservative and Catholic support, and his treatment of Wechsler led one of his few journalistic supporters, the *Freeman*, to make one of its few criticisms of the Senator.

Is the Senator that stupid? It seems improbable. On the other hand, a careful reading of the Voice and other recent hearings would suggest that Senator McCarthy has never been given credit for the substantial amount of ignorance and congenital obtuseness that he can fairly claim to possess.

Rebecca West sensed this. It is a kind of ethical and moral tone deafness and color blindness. It is these defects, one suspects, that make him surprised, amused, and contemptuous when one of his victims squirms and rages under the cumulative outrageousness of his calculated inquisitorial sadism.

It is this ethical and moral blindness that is both the temporary strength and the ultimate weakness of Senator McCarthy. For even today, when he has arrived, and wields great power, he is isolated both morally and politically by the more and more apparent defects of his character and temperament—an isolation recently made concrete by the resignation of the Democratic members of his investigations subcommittee and the

showdown with the White House on the issue of the CIA.

When Joe's opponents lump all the activities of all the current investigating committees—with their widely differing methods and objectives—into a single indictment of "McCarthyism," nobody is more delighted than the Senator, who needs to trade himself up; or the Communists, who need to trade down and discredit as "McCarthyism" such really damaging exposures as the McCarran Committee's investigation of the IPR.

Actually, McCarthyism is 90 per cent McCarthy. Significantly, McCarthy has found few political allies, and no major pressure group is united in his support. However, since he is surrounded by a wide belt of silence, created by those who have decided, out of expediency or cowardice, to ignore him, his support looks wider than it is.

His clique is made up of Americans of all classes. They are not organized nor are they organizable in terms of any bond of common interest. They fear Communism more than they understand it; hence they have been slow to appreciate and reject the demagogic unscrupulousness, incompetence, irresponsibility and boomerang effect of McCarthy's performance in the role of Mr. Anti-Communist. Back in 1950 the worst howlers of Joe's Wheeling speech were quickly corrected by experienced anti-Communist (including ex-Communist) advisers, who took him in hand and guided him through his battles with the Tydings Committee. For a brief moment it appeared as if he might become the leader of a large number of homeless "anti-Communists." But he didn't take guidance well even then, and as for the 1953 model McCarthy, he seems to have neither brakes nor steering gear.

As a result the quality of Joe's kitchen cabinet has declined; earlier friendships have cooled; increasingly, fear and expedience must be relied upon to cement his political alliances. But while he has not been able to expand his press and Congressional support, television and publicity has, it would appear, considerably increased the volume of his popular support. The polls show a man

whose greatest strength is among the least educated and who is almost universally opposed among the college educated and professionals. But as the qualities that isolate him from his fellow Senators become more obvious, it is more likely that the man in the street will follow the lead of the educated, than vice versa.

The liberal critics of Senator McCarthy could help this development—and happily they are increasingly doing so—by disassociating themselves from those who exploit his bad name to attack all investigations of Communism, and who in their own trigger-happy way mow down "McCarthy, Jenner, and Velde," without indicating they are aware of the important differences between them. In making him the titular head of "the forces of McCarthyism" (which they too often identify with all anti-Communist activity, legitimate and illegitimate) they not only reflect unfavorably on their own understanding of the deep national concern over Communism, but inflate McCarthy's importance by ascribing to him an ideology, a national following, and a program, to none of which he can fairly lay claim.

WHAT is Senator McCarthy's program? Just about every politician who has planned to get anywhere has had some kind of program, even though his critics may have denounced him for having none. This is as true for Adolf Hitler or Huey Long as it was for Franklin D. Roosevelt and President Eisenhower.

But Senator McCarthy doesn't say, nor can any consistent set of political principles, convictions, and objectives be deduced from either his voting record or his speeches.

The Congressional voting records compiled by the *ADA World* for the years 1949-52 give the Senator a total of 38 minuses and 12 pluses. This means that McCarthy has tended, as one would expect, to vote against liberal and pro-labor measures, but less consistently than Republican Senators like Taft, Bridges, Bricker, and Hickenlooper, all of whom rank even *lower* on the ADA's scoreboard.

On the whole, the McCarthy record is isolationist, but again, not consistently so. In 1949 he voted with the ADA liberals against his friend McCarran on the DP issue. His vote for ECA aid to totalitarian Spain is certainly not isolationist. But it is balanced by his isolationist vote to retain the "peril points" amendment to the reciprocal trade act.

In 1950 he again crossed up McCarran by voting for a liberalized DP bill—possibly he was nudged by the Wisconsin Germans and Poles. That year his foreign policy votes were isolationist—in favor of cutting ECA and Point Four appropriations, except for another vote for the loan to Franco. In 1951 McCarthy again voted to reduce ECA appropriations. In 1952 he cast three votes that belatedly brought him in line with McCarran on the immigration bill, but he was still coppering his bets on foreign policy. His votes to cut MSA funds and to restrict United States participation in the scarce-materials program were more than balanced by his vote for participation in Nato military aid plans. In this vote McCarthy aligned himself against the hard core of Senate isolationists led by Taft, Hickenlooper, Bricker, and Jenner.

Admittedly, the foregoing data is fragmentary and inconclusive, but the Senator's office was unable to supply anything better. Nor do McCarthy's speeches, books, and formal answers to questions reveal anything resembling a consistent pattern with respect to either domestic or foreign policy. McCarthy, it seems, found a good thing in attacking suspected Communists in the State Department, and he has since deviated scarcely a hair's breadth from that tack. He simply doesn't talk about policy, domestic or foreign, unless it happens to fit into his one-note record. It is revealing that Bohlen was first attacked by Senate Republicans for his position on Yalta—but when McCarthy joined the attack, it was to shift the ground from a question of policy to one of security!

His speech analyzing the record of General Marshall, which was later published as a book, scarcely counts as an expression, even

indirect, of McCarthy's own Far Eastern policy. *America's Retreat from Victory* was a piece of journalistic merchandise written by another and more informed hand, and impressive in its documented review of Marshall's mistakes and failures. But its fantastic insinuations of treason were so close to being libelous as to make this partisan political pamphlet unsaleable, in all probability, to anybody but McCarthy, who used it primarily to inflate his prestige as the scourge of traitors in government.

As Norman Thomas points out, one looks in vain for any speech or statement in which McCarthy has discussed "the nature of international Communism and the sources of Moscow's evil power, or sought to explain to the world the practical and symbolic value of our costly stand for freedom in Korea."

McCarthy has been equally without ideas and equally irresponsible with respect to the defense of Europe. By good luck, his investigators did not get around to mauling the Rias radio station before that admirable Berlin arm of the Voice of America had proved its effectiveness by playing a major, if belated, role in the East German revolt. But even that didn't give Joe any ideas about fighting Communism other than to continue his harassment of our propaganda and library services. He left it to his colleague from Wisconsin, Senator Wiley, to project, in his speech of June 25, an aggressive diplomatic exploitation of the Kremlin's reverses on the western front of the cold war.

He sees the world in one simple and fantastically restricted dimension. Even when he attacks the former Prime Minister of our leading ally, he must operate in his peculiar framework, so that his full thought about Clement Attlee seems to be that he is just another "pink."

AS A political power-house almost wholly dependent upon a publicity connection, Senator McCarthy's time would appear to be running out. Already he is scraping the bottom of the barrel in his search for Communists in government; his recent inquiries have dredged up more anti-Communists than

Communists, and of the latter the majority are old familiar faces. Soon McCarthy will have to put up or shut up in terms of policy, and there are signs that both he and his opponents inside the Eisenhower administration are aware of this. Undoubtedly Senator Wiley was speaking authoritatively when he said that President Eisenhower is not deceived about who is supporting him and who is not; that he "knows saboteurs and malcontents and goldbricks when he sees them."

The Junior Senator from Wisconsin is certainly not quite stupid enough not to be able to supply the missing address on that missive. Either he will have to go along with the Eisenhower program—whatever it turns out to be—or he will have to find himself an independent mass base in public opinion; otherwise he is likely to find that even his publicity connection has been short-circuited.

In the event that McCarthy elects to "go it alone" he will have to mature and consolidate and extend his isolationist and proto-fascist support. But is there an America that will welcome that kind of champion? The answer is apparent: not unless both major parties fumble and fail incredibly.

Perhaps Huey Long would have known how to handle a situation like this. But as George Sokolsky, one of the Senator's last remaining confidantes has said, Joe is not Huey. Nor is Joe admitting—for the present—to any Presidential ambitions. At the moment it is more practicable for him to try to be king-maker rather than kingfish.

As a stepping stone to either elevation the role of "Mr. Anti-Communist" might conceivably serve him sufficiently—if he had either the capacity or the inclination to play it straight and effectively.

Seemingly, on the record to date, he has neither. Either he doesn't know enough to distinguish a Communist from a socialist, an ADA liberal from a subversive—or else he doesn't care. Nor has he shown any disposition to embrace the disciplines and responsibilities that would be entailed by a principled and programmed fight against Communism at home and abroad.

Thus far Joe has had the gallery with him. But acts need freshening and galleries are fickle. One suspects that Joe just isn't big enough for the part—not in a country like ours, at any rate—and if he can't grow, then he's had it, or soon will.